



“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Handling Finances Responsibly

Central Truth: Family finances must be handled with a sense of stewardship.

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How important is the subject of family finances? It is so important that Dr. Louis Evans wrote, “Over many a marriage could be written, 'Till DEBT do us part.’” Money worries are a major factor in a large percentage of the divorces in America.

The Bible speaks much on finances. More than one thousand verses in the New Testament deal with wealth: how to get it, how to give it, how to save it, and how to spend it. Some wit has suggested, “The tenderest nerve in a Baptist's body is the one that runs to his checkbook.”

It is imperative that we study the subject of family finances. Your attitude toward money reveals much about your attitude toward God and the people about you. What you do with your money you are doing with your life. Family finances must be handled with a sense of stewardship. You will account to God for what you did with what you had. You are setting an example for your children and grandchildren in the way you handle your money. Be sure you leave a Christian example for them to follow. .

The Biblical Attitude Toward Wealth

Some people are a little suspicious (or perhaps envious) of any person who has wealth. It might surprise them to learn that the Bible never condemns wealth or people who possess it. It only condemns the wrong

attitude toward and the wrong use of wealth.

Wealthy people can be deeply spiritual. Look at the wealth of Abraham, David, Solomon, and other great men of God in the biblical record. Abraham was the “Friend” of God (James 2:23). David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). David and Bathsheba named their little son Solomon, but the prophet of God named him Jedidiah, which means “Beloved of the Lord.” Wealth does not make a person unspiritual; poverty does not make him spiritual. God looks at the heart, not the financial statement.

It is the attitude toward wealth, not wealth itself, which creates a problem. The *“love of money is the root of all evil,”* bringing sin and sorrow into your life (1 Timothy 6:10). Beware that you control your wealth instead of letting it control you.

The possession of wealth is accompanied by responsibility. Jesus said, *“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12:48). If human beings require accountability for the use of wealth, how much more will God require it? Read Jesus' parable about the talents committed to servants and their being called to report on their stewardship (Matthew 25:14-30). Each was responsible for what he did with what he had. That is the way God will call you and me to account to Him.

Work, as well as wealth, is of concern to God. He assigned work for the human race (Genesis 2:15; 3:19) to make us productive, not as a curse for sin. He set six days for work and one for rest and worship. He decreed, *“If any would not work, neither should he eat”* (II Thessalonians 3:10). You should work to get wealth to give to God, meet your own needs, and help meet the needs of others. That is the kind of stewardship toward wealth that will receive God's “Well done.”

Your Altitude Toward Wealth

Money is “coined personality.” You trade a part of your life for every dollar you earn. What you do with your money, therefore, you are doing with your life. Suppose you could look at the end of your life and count the number of hours you have to live. Suppose every purchase subtracted a proportionate number of hours from your life span. How many hours of your life would you trade for a pair of the latest style of shoes, a new automobile, a two-week vacation, or an evening out with friends? Think about it! What you do with your money you are doing with your life.

Money is a serious problem to many people. At least 25 percent of the families in America are in serious financial trouble. Debt caused by easy

credit, abuse of credit cards, and the desire for the immediate satisfaction of desires is threatening many marriages. It has been estimated that 40 percent of the divorces in the country have money as a major factor in the breakup of the home. That is why we have a study on “Handling Finances Responsibly.” Do you see the need in your own life?

There is a cure for the spiritual illness of a wrong attitude toward wealth. The remedy is fourfold. Measure your life by these guidelines and see if you find a remedy for personal financial problems in them.

(1) Love God supremely (Mark 12:30). When you love God above every other person or thing and love your neighbor as yourself, the problem of handling wealth is conquered. Each of your business transactions is prefaced with the question, “What would God have me to do?” God will never lead you astray. Someone has said, “Love God supremely and then do as you please.” That is safe because you will be pleased to do what God wills. When you follow God's will, He will feed you like the birds of the air and clothe you like the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:25-34).

(2) Kill the spirit of greed. Many people think their problems would be solved if they just had more money. Not so. The person who has financial problems at \$500 per week will have financial problems at \$1,500 per week. The problem is not “how much” but “who.” It is not your possessions but your spirit that determines your success or failure in life. More money is not the answer. Discipline in controlling your money is the answer.

(3) Develop the joy of giving. God loves a “cheerful giver” (II Corinthians 9:7). That is one advantage of giving at least 10 percent of your income to the Lord before you spend money on anything else. It may “pinch” for a while, but soon you will rejoice in giving. I can give \$100.00 with greater freedom of spirit now than I could give \$1.00 in my early Christian life. I have developed the joy of giving. If the heart goes before the gift, the gift becomes worship and is acceptable to God. Do not give until it hurts; give until it quits hurting and becomes a joy.

(4) Distinguish between your needs and your wants. Meet your needs and discipline your wants. The list of things we call “necessities” increases almost every year. Many of those things are not truly necessary to our welfare; they are only things we would like to have but could do without quite well. Make two lists; one of true needs and the other of wants. Arrange each list in the order of priority — things you need or want most are put at the top of each list. Determine first how you can meet all of the needs before you spend anything on wants. Then you can balance your budget.

Principles of Getting and Giving

Here are six principles which you should observe in handling your finances. First, God has all the wealth in the world because He created and sustains it all (Psalm 24:1; I Chronicles 29:14). Second, God shares part of His wealth with His people so that they may be His stewards in handling His resources (Deuteronomy 8:17, 18; Matthew 25:14). Third, the key to getting is giving. Jesus said that when we give it will be given back to us (Luke 6:38). Fourth, it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). It really is when you learn the grace of giving. Fifth, God's power and grace are released when you give joyfully (II Corinthians 9:6-11). Sixth, one day you will account to God for what you did with what you have.

Review those six principles and let them guide you in financial stewardship. They will keep you from regret later on.

How to Control the Money You Receive

Establish a budget. Most financial problems come because there is no attempt to budget expenditures. A family budget need not be extensive, but it is essential to a sound financial program. If you have never set up a family budget before, here are steps to follow in doing so.

(1) Have every member of the family write down every cent spent and the purpose for spending it over a thirty-day period. (2) Survey your financial situation by writing down your income, debts, cost of interest, etc. (3) Determine that you will move toward a “D-Day” (debtless day) for your family. (4) Set priorities on all cash outlay, and purchase needs before wants. (5) Do not charge a single item until your finances are under control. (6) Payoff your smallest debt; then add that payment to the next smallest and make a double payment. Then add those two to the next until all your debts are paid (except perhaps for the mortgage on a house). (7) Establish a balanced budget by giving 10 percent to the Lord, 10 percent to savings, 20 percent to debt retirement, and 60 percent to living expenses. The retirement provision could be adjusted as follows: 4 percent if you are twenty-one years old, 6 percent if you are thirty years old, 13 percent if you are fifty years old; plus Social Security.

Restrain yourself in credit buying — paying in the future for something received in the present. If not kept under control, credit can destroy your marriage. In the typical home 40 percent of desertions by the husband, 45 percent of the cruelty, and 70 percent of the worry is over finances. Most of it is caused by a family trying to live above its income. Beware!

Guard where financial problems develop. Most are because of failure to build a sensible family budget, irresponsibility in installment buying, poor records of family finances, extravagant wants with limited income, short-term planning, and ignoring the principles of divine stewardship over all of life and its resources. Guard against sales appeals which lead you to impulse buying. The advertisement will say, “Buy today and save \$50 off the regular price.” But just remember that you do not save by spending.

A day is coming when each person will answer to God for what he did with what he had. Spend your money as if you were spending God's money (for it is!). Work as if everything depends on you; trust as if everything depends on God. Live by the principle of Proverbs 3:9-10 and you will be a faithful steward. Do not curse your family with an undue burden of debt.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are there so many references to money in the New Testament?
2. What is meant by financial stewardship?
3. What does I Timothy 6:8-10 say about wealth?
4. What is meant in saying, “Money is coined personality”?
5. Why is money such a serious problem to so many?
6. How does God say we should get our wealth?
7. How does God say we should use our wealth?
8. Why is a family budget essential to financial health?
9. In what areas do financial problems develop in the family?
10. How can you be a better steward of your finances?